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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR AF/FO, AF/E, INR/AA, DRL
FOR DS/IP/AF AKORT
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PARIS FOR D'ELIA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [MA](#)
SUBJECT: GENERAL FIDY STILL AT LARGE AFTER COUP ATTEMPT

REF: ANTANANARIVO 1297

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Antananarivo is calm and quiet in the wake of the failed weekend coup attempt although the "coup" leader, General Fidy, remains in hiding and in occasional contact with the press. Fidy appears to have grossly over-reached as few military officers rallied to his cause. During his short-lived takeover of Ivato Air Force Base, a number of weapons and ammunition were stolen; all have now been returned. Although slow in responding, the Government of Madagascar (GOM) has now issued a statement reassuring the public and appealing for calm in the run-up to the December 3 Presidential election. The Embassy continues to monitor the situation closely and will issue an updated warden message to Americans if the situation shows any signs of deteriorating. At the moment, that appears unlikely. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Three days after a failed "coup attempt" resulting in the death of one soldier (reftel), the GOM has reclaimed Ivato Air Force Base, but General Andrianafidisoa (Fidy) remains at large. Police forces and gendarmes searched his home over the weekend, reportedly pursuant to an arrest warrant. Embassy security contacts report President Ravalomanana was furious when he heard news of the attempt and demanded Fidy be brought in at once. Meanwhile, General Fidy continues to give local and international press interviews from a secret location.

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¶3. (U) In several interviews, General Fidy has described and justified his actions of November 17 and 18. He insists if the GOM truly wanted to find him, it would be possible by tracking his phone calls. Fidy has also said his efforts do not constitute a "coup attempt," because Ravalomanana's government is not legitimate.

GOM Reaction

¶4. (U) Over 24 hours after the attempted coup, the GOM issued a statement, signed by the Minister of Telecommunications, on radio and television acknowledging General Fidy's actions, assuring it had taken "the necessary measures," and appealing for the "calm, vigilance and wisdom" of the Malagasy people (full text in Paragraph 11). The GOM called for solidarity against seditious actions to ensure free, fair and transparent elections on December 3.

¶5. (U) At a campaign rally in Antananarivo November 19, President Ravalomanana warned his opponents not to work with "troublemakers," and insisted the rule of law would prevail in Madagascar. The President defiantly stated he will not be frightened by threats. He

cautioned all journalists - Malagasy and international - and media outlet owners in Madagascar against publishing "unchecked news." (Note: A BBC report numbered Fidy's supporters at 100, by far the highest estimate. Fidy has been on the front page of most local newspapers the last three days. End Note).

¶6. (SBU) Consistent with GOM efforts to downplay the situation, GOM General Raonenantsoamampianina, Head of the Army General Staff, said in a national television interview that this is an internal military argument that will be handled "in the family." Some of our military contacts pointed out that the lack of following for General Fidy was a positive sign for Madagascar's democracy. In addition, they reported that all of the weapons taken during the short-lived takeover of Ivato Air Force Base have been recovered and returned to their armories.

Protest at Embassies?

¶7. (SBU) On November 18 Antananarivo's Radio ACEEM broadcast a declaration by Pierre Tsiranana (brother of presidential candidate Philippe Tsiranana, of the PFDM, and son of the first Malagasy president) calling for "sit-ins" at the French, Japanese and American Embassies to protest the international community's support for the December 3 election date. Opposition contacts report a final date for demonstrations has not been selected, but confirmed that planning for possible demonstrations at foreign missions was ongoing.

¶8. (SBU) Several opposition officials have told the Embassy that most of the 13 opponent candidates are meeting regularly to coordinate strategy. While no opposition candidate has a national following, some have regional bases of support and significant financial resources:

-- Fianarantsoa natives Pety Rakotoniaina and Herizo Razafimahaleo

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are outspoken opponents of Ravalomanana with supporters in south central Madagascar;

-- Tamatave Mayor Roland Ratsiraka is unpopular in his own city, but has name recognition, money, and the support of some politicians from the old regime;

-- Former transition president Norbert Ratsirahonana is the biggest threat to Ravalomanana's Antananarivo Merina ethnic base. He repeatedly denies publicly that he will withdraw to support the President;

-- Ny Hasina Andriamanjato, a wealthy former Minister, lost to Ravalomanana in the Antananarivo mayoral election and holds a grudge. His father, opposition figure Pastor Andriamanjato, publicly endorsed General Fidy's actions;

-- Jean Lahinrinko (former National Assembly President) and Manandafy each has substantial resources and public followings in the southern Tulear province.

Emergency Action Committee Reconvenes

¶9. (U) Ambassador reconvened the Emergency Action Committee (EAC), meeting at 1000 local time November 20 to discuss the situation. Members agreed that calm still prevailed in Antananarivo, with people going about their business and no particular threat to Americans. There is no evidence of an enhanced security presence. The EAC agreed there was no need to issue an immediate Warden Message but may propose one later this week to remind Americans to be aware of election activities leading up to and after December 3 and to remain vigilant with regard to personal security.

COMMENT:

¶10. (SBU) Slow to give a public response, the GOM has now made

significant efforts to downplay the weekend's events. One culturally-rooted explanation for the delayed response is that to acknowledge the event would be to lend it importance. Another Malagasy interpretation is that General Fidy was not apprehended because he would somehow be more problematic as a "martyr" if he were a prisoner. Yet another conspiracy theory suggests that President Ravalomanana orchestrated the entire affair; perhaps to give him an excuse to crack down on the opposition. The half-hearted nature of General Fidy's attempt and his easy escape are equally perplexing. Some Embassy GOM contacts insist Fidy is being closely monitored, while others assert he will be arrested as soon possible. Opposition candidates are reportedly meeting November 20 to decide how to react to (read: take advantage of) General Fidy's actions. From a security standpoint, Post assesses little has changed, but the election campaign has certainly become even more complex. END COMMENT.

11. Text of Statement by the GOM

STATEMENT BY THE GOVERNMENT OF MADAGASCAR

For the sake of transparency, the Government of Madagascar has the duty of providing information to its citizens on the recent events taking place in the country, particularly in the capital.

Since the decision made during the May 9, 2006 Cabinet Meeting, related to the presidential election, certain political groups constantly planned actions pertaining to disinformation and perturbation in order to prevent the said election at all costs.

Such irresponsible outbursts can only harm national unity.

What happened on November 17, 2006, further illustrates this fact:

Some handouts were distributed throughout the city, indicating that General Randrianafidisoa had taken power;

After a failed attempt to take the Ministry of National Defense, General Randrianafidisoa forced his way into the Ivato Air Force Base;

He seized the weapons and ammunitions at the base, and took some officials as hostages;

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This led to exchanges of fire, during which a military officer was shot dead by assailants.

In the face of such divisive actions and the different rumors spreading, the Government of Madagascar is taking care of its responsibilities and calls on the population to remain calm, but also to show caution and wisdom.

Let us remain one and show solidarity against these actions of insurrection, so that we can protect our national sovereignty and democracy.

That is the only way to guarantee freedom and transparency during the December 3 presidential elections, which is meant to be a model in Africa.

Antananarivo, November 19, 2006.

The Minister of Telecommunications,
Posts and Communication

//signature//
Bruno Ramaroson ANDRIATAVISON

END TEXT.

MCGEE